

Madame Chair and the committee, thank you for taking the time to listen to my story.

My name is Joe Miller, my daughter's name is Devan. We live in Big Sky. Devan is 6 years old and attends 1st grade at Ophir School. When Devan graduates from Lone Peak High, she will be the first student with Down syndrome to complete her entire education in Big Sky.

I'm the branch manager at First Security Bank. A good chunk of my work day consists of analyzing personal and business financials. The simplest mistake a banker can make is to become lost in the numbers and forget about the most important factor, the human factor. In banking, the common term used for the human factor is character. Character is often the difference maker between success and failure.

My guess is any opposition you will hear today about this bill will be related to budgets and whether or not our state can afford to offer this basic service. As a parent of a child with special needs, I firmly believe their argument lacks that human factor. If you take a strong look at the kids at the center of this debate, you're going to find an overwhelming amount of character. Devan has proven over and over again that if you give her the tools to succeed, she will beat the odds. She used the early education services offered by our state to help her prepare for school. This bill will offer additional tools for her to succeed as an adult.

I've witnessed people place a price tag on Devan before. Our insurance company does it. Our school system does it. As parents, we're not asking you to spend money on our children; we're asking you to invest in their future. Our kids aren't asking for a hand out. They are asking for an opportunity. If you stand on their side of this issue, they won't let you down.

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